

THE EVOLUTION OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: A UNIQUE CONSTRUCT

PRERNA CHANDEL

School of Management, Bahra University, Wahnaghat, Solan, Himachal Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

The term Employee engagement first appeared and propounded in an academic journal in 1990 by William A. Kahn. Since then it has evolved and shown that out of several resources available to the organizations, keeping the employees engaged in the workplace is of prime concern. The objective of this article is to highlight the historical roots of employee engagement and to clarify what is meant by employee engagement and its relevance. Therefore a review study of research papers/ literature in the area of employee engagement has been studied. The key finding is that employee engagement is a multi-faceted construct.

KEYWORDS: Employee, Employee Engagement, Behaviour & Modern Management

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1. INTRODUCTION

Employees are the backbone of every organization as they are vital to its spirit and competitiveness. Engaged employees must be considered as a most valuable asset for every organization. The higher level of employee engagement in national and international organizations promotes the retention of talent, promotes customer loyalty, and improves organizational performance and value of a stakeholder. Engaged employees deliver a better outcome with a positive attitude towards the organization and its values, which is important for its growth and development (Robinson et al., 2004; Saks, 2006). Therefore communicating to the employees, making them feel valued and inculcating a strong corporate culture have been considered vital for the management of every firm and business.(Kontakos,2007).

During recent years, there seems to be a major attention towards employee engagement. Examining and imploring the understanding the history of management thoughts believed to be the source for current practices and terms aid in the understanding of the current practices and its implications.

The term Employee engagement first appeared and propounded in an academic journal in 1990 by William A. Kahn. Prior to Kahn and others management practitioners, employee engagement term and its characteristics were not seen in the literature but later it led to an immersion in the work. The work of contributors to the management thoughts such as Frederick Taylor, Lillian Gilbreth, Mary Parker Follett, and Elton Mayo's Hawthorne studies, among others, continue to influence today's practices. An underlying foundation of each of their works is the idea of integration, whether it is an integration of worker, skill and efficiency (Taylor); integration of human effect (Gilbreth); integration of work, power and conflict resolution (Follett); and interpersonal relations and productivity (Mayo). (Grace K. Dagher, 2015)

Similar can be explained about employee-engagement, which promotes an integration of the individual through a sense of satisfaction and by extension commitment to the company through continuous improvement, a behavior which is reinforced through financial rewards, thus increasing job satisfaction and the cycle repeats. Saks (2006) notes that engaged employees display an emotional connection(emotion) while performing their duties and responsibilities(behavioral) and will display a mental absorption (cognitive) while performing these duties (Shuck and Wollard, 2009). These associations show that employee engagement has been present, in different situations, throughout management history.

Employee engagement may seem a relatively recent concept but actually, it goes back over 28 years when the term first appeared in an academic journal in 1990. Prior to that, during the 70's and 80's, HR's (or as it was then 'personnel's') focus was on employee satisfaction. But this had little or no connection with performance and was more about the employee than the organization or the employee's relationship with it. The focus then moved from satisfaction to commitment (and somewhere along the way 'personnel' became 'human resources.') in return for a job, and possibly a job for life, the employee would be loyal and commit himself to the organization. Whilst commitment is an important element of and predictor of engagement it cannot replace engagement. But then things started to change. Increased global competition and the shift from a manufacturing economy to a service one meant employers needed to be more flexible, leaner and competitive. Traditional industries closed or were severely cut back and employees learned the hard way that there were no jobs for life, that to progress in their careers they too needed to be more flexible and move to where the opportunities were.

The first appearance of the term, engagement, was in an *Academy of Management Journal* article, "Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work" (Kahn, 1990). His work is inspired and drawn from the works of Goffman (1961), which is based on role theory stating that "people act out momentary attachments and detachments in role performances" (Kahn, 1990). Even though Goffman's work was not related to organizational life directly, but Kahn got inspired from the role playing concept and commenced to identify similar behavior in a workplace as a unique construct. Kahn (1990) defined that unique construct employee engagement as "personal engagement/disengagement – a harnessing of the individuals' selves within work role contexts manifesting in physical, cognitive and emotional role performances or an uncoupling of the selves causing withdrawal, and the individual will then defend him/herself physically, cognitively or emotionally while performing the work roles".

Moreover, Shuck and Wollard (2010) defined the term employee engagement as "an individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes". Kahn's concepts of engagement/disengagement were influenced by a combination of Alderfer's (1972) and Maslow's (1954) concept that individuals need self-employment and self-expression at work. The classification of engagement results showed that unlike disengaged employees, personally engaged employees are more satisfied and productive.

Drawing from the work of Goffman(1961), Maslow(1954,1970) and Alderfer(1972), Kahn's (1990) study began with the basis that employees can use different degrees of their selves "physically, cognitively, and emotionally", selves-in-roles adjusted by the individuals while performing their roles, which, in turn, has inference for their work and experiences. Employee engagement has been described as a distinct and unique construct that is made up of cognitive, emotional and behavioral components, all of which are associated with individual role performance(Saks,2006).

One of the first challenges presented by the literature is the lack of a universal definition of employee engagement. Kahn (1990) defines employee engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work

roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances". Most often employee engagement has been defined as the emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization or the amount of discretionary effort exhibited by employees in their job (Frank et al 2004). Although it is acknowledged and accepted that employee engagement is a multi-faceted construct, as previously suggested by Kahn (1990), Truss et al (2006) define employee engagement simply as 'passion for work', a psychological state which is seen to encompass the three dimensions of engagement discussed by Kahn (1990), and captures the common theme running through all these definitions.

The existence of various definitions and conceptualizations makes the state of knowledge around employee engagement vague and difficult to determine, as each piece of research is undertaken under a different protocol, using different measures of engagement under different circumstances. In addition, unless employee engagement can be universally defined and measured, it cannot be managed, nor can it be known if efforts to improve it are working (Ferguson 2007). This highlights the problems of comparability caused by differences in definition.

Furthermore, whilst it is acknowledged that employee engagement has been defined in many different ways, it is also argued the definitions often sound similar to other better known and established constructs such as 'organizational commitment' and 'organizational citizenship behavior' (OCB) (Robinson et al 2004). Thus Robinson et al (2004) defined engagement as 'one step up from commitment'. As a result, employee engagement has the appearance of being yet another trend, or what some might call "old wine in a new bottle".

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee engagement has become a hot topic in recent years. Their view aims to add value to the current state of knowledge by critically evaluating the existing literature on employee engagement and providing a reflective stance on existing debates and findings.

For the study and clear insight in to the research title numerous works of various authors has been divided into 3 key studies and whose summary is given below.

2.1 Historical Evolution of Employee Engagement

The management discipline's past explains its present state (Bedeian, 1998). Examining and understanding the history of management thoughts believed to be the source for current practices and terms aid in the understanding of the current theories and their implications.

Koontz, (1961); Novicevic et al., (2013) The development of management thoughts continue with Elton Mayo's work and the Hawthorne experiments that are well-known in the field of management and social research. The Hawthorne experiments/studies exposed that management must center on interpersonal relations.

Wren and Hay, (1977) Heames and Breland, (2010) implies Frederick Taylor, the father of scientific management, was noted as the most important pioneer. Frederick Taylor's thoughts and principles substantially continue to contribute and influence today's business practices (Kemp, 2013).

Bedeian and Wren, (2001) The Hawthorne studies are among the most popular and most criticized management research studies associated with interpersonal relations. The concern for the human factor in the workplace was associated with the human relations school that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s; however, the first management pioneer to spread the

concern for the human element in the industry was Robert Owen (Evansetal, 2013).

Wren (2005) argued that the Hawthorne studies did not really discover new things, as similar findings were anticipated in the work of Williams (1920), Mathewson (1931) and Taylor (1911). All criticism aside, a number of researchers in the organizational behavior field claim that many organizational behavior topics revert to the Hawthorne studies (Muldoon, 2012). Elton Mayo believed that “a worker is a person whose attitudes and effectiveness are conditioned by social demands from both inside and outside the workplant” (Hartley, 2006).

Wren, (2005) Lillian Gilbreth’s first contribution was to examine the human element through the time and motion study. Lillian recognized that workers need to feel included in the decision-making, have a sense of job security and be interested in their work. Engaging employee was a call from Lillian Gilbreth; the human factor advanced the scientific management and the misperception of this school and served as a base for other works, such as Mary Parker Follett and Elton Mayo and others to come.

Tsukamoto, (2008) Contrary to most perceptions of Taylor’s work, he actually stressed a systemic framework of training workers with the necessary skills to perform their work duties, but supervisors could and should also create an experience of employee engagement through more meaningful work and purpose. One of Frederick Taylor’s followers, Lillian Gilbreth (first lady of management), highlighted the importance of the human element in the scientific management movement.

Attridge, (2009) Employee engagement can be improved by adopting specific workplace behavioral practices, such as job design, supervisory communication, and interaction.

Bedeian and Wren, (2009) explained that the scientific management not only has prepared the way for the development of well-accepted practices but also the implications of the scientific management principles are incorporated in the post-modern management.

Shuck and Wollard (2009) a major component of scientific management is the standardization and specialization of skills, and the meaningfulness is derived through the knowledge of the appropriate skills- and performance-related, pay so that the workers would be induced to continuously improve their skills (All organization theories have in common that they heuristically – instrumentally, methodically–invoke a model of human nature, only heuristically organization members are modelled as economic men: as self-interested agents who evaluate and choose a course of action in relation to gains and losses that are signalled by incentive structures.

Schachter, (2010) Taylor’s approach stressed that to accomplish this, adequate feedback was required so that the employee understood what was expected of him another example is meaningful workplaces. The American Society for Training and Development, using data from 776 human resource executives, defined employee engagement as employees both mentally and emotionally invested in their organization’s success which further promotes the creation of meaningful work environments (Shuck and Wollard, 2009).

Kahn, (2010) the worker needs to have a sense of belonging and have a say in his work; in other words, engaging the worker. Engagement is an incredibly delicate phenomenon, both challenging to develop and tough to sustain because it is mostly built in the interpretation of the work environment (Shuck and Reio, 2011).

Schachter, (2010) Taylor's approach stressed greater employee willingness to perform and improve their skills by rewarding those improvements, thus motivating the worker and increasing the willingness to continuously improve.

Grachev and Rakitsky, (2013) Frederick Taylor's scientific management indicated that it is important to scientifically study the motives that influence the human factor. Frederick Taylor's scientific method was created to increase productivity through employee engagement: cooperation, harmony and combined intellectual work.

Gibson et al., (2013) Mary Parker Follett, one of the main contributors to the human relations movement, implied that an individual achieves greater satisfaction through cooperation. Follett believed in a "power-with" relationship philosophy in which employees and their leaders alike share power, such as contributory decision power versus "power over" employees. Employers and employees should work together for a common purpose. Her introduction of conflict as a tool, though an understanding that there are three finalities in conflict, a one-sided dominating outcome, a compromise such that neither side wins and an outcome where both sides win through integration, is still cited in the literature. Crucial to her human element aspects was her advocacy of group creativity and positive relationships between management and employees. This also reflects in her work titled, "The Giving of Orders", where she proposes that even when considering commands, the ultimate outcome will reflect how the command is perceived by the employee; thus, each command should be depersonalized and reflect only what is needed by the group (Damart, 2013). This view also reflects a core of scientific management calling for a depersonalized form of commanding where neither employee nor employer has any authority over another and the joint effort with mutual responsibilities toward the common goal is preferable an integrated effort. Thus, it appears that Follett blended the scientific approach of an impersonal approach to job analysis (law of situation), although she did advocate a more egalitarian view (Novicevic et al., 2013). However, "Follett's ideas on management are the product of an intellectual trajectory different from that taken by practitioners such as Fayol or Taylor" (Damart, 2013). For example, integration goes against Fayol's principles, which specifically cite hierarchical powers and a philosophy of unity of command—unchallenged orders and sheer obedience. Unlike Follett, who notes that the organization is a totality made up of the sum of its parts, and everyone is part of that totality.

Dent and Bozeman (2014) many have criticized Frederick Taylor for his concern about productivity and not caring about the human element. Taylor's scientific management was more than to improve the business efficiency, but it was also about effectively utilizing the resources of the business including the human resource.

Today, Taylor's ideas are still relevant for managers (Bedeian, 1998) and by extension within the context of employee engagement. For example, a major principle of employee engagement is to provide the employees with clear expectations and feedback to have employee engagement (Garber, 2007).

These were all part of the themes that the major management gurus in the field such as Frederick Taylor, Lillian Gilbreth, Mary Parker Follett and Elton Mayo's Hawthorne studies contributed and promoted.

2.2 Conceptualizing the Definition of Employee Engagement

Kahn (1990), one of the first scholars to study engagement. Defined the term personal engagement as the "harnessing of institutional members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance".

Luthans and Peterson (2002) elaborated on Kahn's work on employee engagement, which provides a convergent theory for Gallup's empirically derived employee engagement. They opined that to be emotionally engaged is to form

meaningful connections with others and to experience empathy for them. In contrast, being cognitively engaged refers to those who are acutely aware of their mission and role in their work environment Dvir, Eden, Avolio, and Shamir (2002) defined active engagement in terms of high levels of activity, initiative, and responsibility. Towers Perrin (2003), defines that engagement involves both emotional and rational factors relating to work and the overall work experience.

Buckingham and Coffman in 1999, wrote the book '*First Break all the Rules*' helped the term 'employee-engagement' become popular in the corporate world.

Various definitions assert that employee engagement is something that is produced by aspects in the workplace (McCashland, 1999; Miles, 2001; Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2003), while others assert that it is something that the individual brings to the work place (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002; Goddard, 1999).

Perrin's Global Workforce Study (2003) uses the definition "employees' willingness and ability to help their company succeed, largely by providing discretionary effort on a sustainable basis." According to the study, engagement is affected by many factors which involve both emotional and rational factors relating to work and the overall work experience.

May et al (2004) found that meaningfulness, safety, and availability were significantly related to engagement? They also found job enrichment and role fit to be positive predictors of meaningfulness; rewarding co-worker and supportive supervisor relations were positive predictors of safety, while adherence to co-worker norms and self-consciousness were negative predictors. Overall, meaningfulness was found to have the strongest relation to different employee outcomes in terms of engagement.

Robinson et al. (2004) define employee engagement as "a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its value. An engaged employee is aware of business context and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. The organization must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee." Robinson et al. (2004) define employee engagement as "a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its value. An engaged employee is aware of business context and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. The organization must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee."

West (2005) argues that when individuals feel positive emotions, they are able to think in a more flexible, open-minded way and are also likely to feel greater self-control, cope more effectively and be less defensive in the workplace.

According to Robinson (2006), employee engagement can be achieved through the creation of an organizational environment where positive emotions such as involvement and pride are encouraged, resulting in improved organizational performance, lower employee turnover and better health.

Truss et al (2006), define employee engagement simply as „passion for work“, a psychological state which is seen to encompass the three dimensions of engagement discussed by Kahn (1990), and captures the common theme running through all these definitions.

Robertson-Smith and Markwick (2009) throw light on what engagement is and reveals that it is an important yet complex challenge, and there remains a great deal of scope for discussing the various approaches.

Shashi (2011) reinforced the importance of employee communication on the success of a business. She revealed

that an organization should realize the importance of employees, more than any other variable, as the most powerful contributor to an organization's competitive position.

Bijaya Kumar Sundaray (2011) focused on various factors which lead to employee engagement and what should a company do to make the employees engaged. Proper attention to engagement strategies will increase organizational effectiveness in terms of higher productivity, profits, quality, customer satisfaction, employee retention, and increased adaptability.

Wellins and Concelman (2011) suggest that "Employee engagement is the illusive force that motivates employees to higher levels of performance. This coveted energy is an amalgam of "commitment, loyalty, productivity, and ownership." they further added that it includes, "feelings and attitudes employees have towards their jobs and their organization

Singh & Shukla (2012) tried to find out what variables are significant to create an engaged workforce. The study was exploratory in nature and the data has been collected from a tin manufacturing organization.

2.3 Relevance of Employee Engagement

The interests and activities of employees if in alignment with their organizational goals, prove to be more effective. Gagnon & Michael (2003) proposed that the effective execution of strategic organizational initiatives entail employee alignment. Moreover, due to employee ignorance or misperception, a majority of organizational strategies are going flop (Speculand, 2006).

Loch, (2008) suggested alignment as employees clear understanding of what they can contribute to the organization.

Jawaharrani (2011) examined some of the literature on Employee engagement, explore work-place culture & work-life balance policies & practices followed in industries in order to promote employee engagement in their organizations to increase their employees' productivity and retain them. Work-life balance is a key driver of employees' satisfaction.

Ram & Gantasala (2011) investigated the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement in the Jordanian Industry. Bhatla (2011) focused on the need for such employees and how their presence can improve the progress and work efficiency of the organization as a whole. Also focused on the challenges faced by the HR managers to improve employee engagement for an organization's survival.

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Bijaya Kumar Sundaray (2011) focused on various factors which lead to employee engagement and what should a company do to make the employees engaged. Proper attention to engagement strategies will increase organizational effectiveness in terms of higher productivity, profits, quality, customer satisfaction, employee retention, and increased adaptability.

Siddhanta & Roy (2012) explored implications for theory, further research, and practices by synthesizing modern 'Employee Engagement' activities being practiced by the corporate with the review of findings from previous researches /

surveys.

Singh & Shukla (2012) tried to find out what variables are significant to create an engaged workforce. The study was exploratory in nature and the data has been collected from a tin manufacturing organization.

In addition to this, Vlcek (1987) argued that “high turnover is due in part to insufficient personnel standards and ambitious individuals who sometimes contradict company goals”.

Macey (2008) Manager’s role is crucial in evolving systemic linkages which, in turn, stimulate high employee involvement.

Goodridge (2009) Successful business endeavors involve confidence “built on respect and timely communication, as well as energized leaders and strategic responses that eliminate actions based on panic”. Further suggested by a researcher that “the keys to getting through the tough times are respect and timely communication” (Goodridge, 2009).

Ahmed, Shields, White & Wilbert (2010) explored that communication contributes to “crafting healthier relations between managers and their employees and the entire organization ultimately benefits from this relationship”.

Khetarpal (2010) Communication “affects coordination of effort, performance feedback, job instruction, a motivation of employees, group effort, and interpersonal relations ...” these factors all together advocate vivacious organizational climate. Job-related training largely contribute to employees becoming the proficient in their domain of responsibility. On the other hand, recognition plays an important role in getting employees to get energized or motivated to perform their duties well.

Peers give respect to the recognized employees and push them to outshine in their respective responsibilities. Axtell, Holman, Unsworth, Wall, Waterson & Harrington, (2000); Beattie & Smith, (2010); Kinsey, (2009)130; Mahal, (2009)131 and Sand, Cangemi & Ingram (2011)132 emphasized that value creation for an organization could be done by employee development through recognition of achievements, encouragement for efforts, and training.

Wright, Cropanzano & Meyer (2004) From the perspective of human resources it makes sense to deal with the employees of their organization to focus on situational or state-like variables and from the perspective of selection, it makes sense to focus on more trait-like or stable variables. Researchers recommended that states or moods are more essential than stable traits for considering absenteeism, job satisfaction, and pro-social behavior. They also suggested that to increase job satisfaction, organizations would be considerate to manage employee moods. For selection perspective, it is advisable to select psychologically healthy individuals because they have the temperament to be engaged, energized, or satisfied i.e. to focus on stable traits.

It is imperative to recognize both practically and theoretically the positioning of engagement in the network of antecedents and consequences along with job attitudes. It is also imperative to figure out the ranking of engagement among more conventional job attitudes. There is a dearth of research using relative weights analyses and hierarchical regressions so, engagement has become one of the significant research topics.

Additionally, employee engagement connections with business results (Harter et al., 2002) make it very vital research topic for scholars and practitioners.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To explore and highlight the evolution of employee engagement.
- To gain insight into the conceptualization of employee engagement.
- To study the relevance of employee engagement.

4. METHODOLOGY

In this article, literature review method was employed as this is an accepted strategy for summarizing literature on a concept. Integrative literature reviews are considered to be one of the best ways to capture at a from various emerging fields (Torraco, 2005). Under the process of review around thirty academic and popular research papers/ literature in the area of employee engagement have been studied and have come up with different connotations of employee engagement. As employee engagement is an emerging topic and being studied by different researchers on various aspects of the topic with varied conceptualization, an integrative literature review method is adopted and presented in this article in a descriptive study manner. In this article, research and survey findings of Gallup (Gallup Workplace Auditor GWA), ISOS Group (case studies linking engagement and sustainability), IRS, Blessing White & HR Anexi, CIPD, GreenBiz Employee Engagement Report, Towers Perrine, Aon Hewitt report among others have been reviewed.

5. KEY FINDINGS

5.1 Evolution of Employee Engagement

Past 28 years of employee engagement research yielded multiple operationalization and conceptualizations, imperilling the engagement concept to misinterpretations and confusion. From its inception, the employee engagement concept criticized at the workplace as “old wine in a new bottle” (Wefald, Katz, Downey & Rust, 2010). In order to clarify and unify employee engagement concept across the realms of academics and industry, many employee engagement scholars have been continuously called for research work to compare numerous conceptualizations (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006). As a result of this demand, the concept of employee engagement has achieved a place in the mainstream of corporate houses and academic research and scholarly community also advocates its importance in an organization’s life.

In the following table, an attempt has been made to discuss the evolution and conceptualizations of the engagement concept given by renowned researchers and consultancies of this field in chronological order.

Table 1: Conceptualisation of the Employee Engagement Term

S. No	Researcher	Year	Concept
1	William A. Kahn	1990	“Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work” defined an employee’s “personal engagement” as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances”
2	Maslach et al.	2001	Proposed employee engagement as positive antithesis to burnout and demarcated the concept as “a persistent positive affective state characterized by high levels of activation and pleasure”
3	Schaufeli	2001	Identified engagement as the positive antithesis of burnout and stated that this phenomenon is associated with energy, involvement and efficacy.
4	Harter et al.	2002	Proposed employee engagement at business unit level
5	Baumruk	2004	Emotional and intellectual commitment with their organization, propose three primary constructs- Say, Stay, Strive

Table 1: Contd.,			
6	Robinson et al.	2004	Debated that the well-established constructs such as organizational citizenship behavior and organizational commitment overlap with the concept of employee engagement.
7	Heintzman et al.	2005	Separated organizational engagement and job engagement into distinct forms of employee engagement and proposed that employee engagement concept came out from the literature of social exchange theory.
8	Saks	2006	Suggested link between two interrelated components: employee satisfaction and employee commitment, together constitutes employee engagement.
9	Richman	2006	Proposed that high degrees of attachment and involvement with their employers and organizations is the characteristics of engaged employees.
10	Woodruffe	2006	Argued that employee engagement depends on the satisfaction of employee's needs by their employers. These needs could be categorized as: role engagement, job satisfaction, and compensation package. In addition, he recommended that horizontal and vertical communication is a key aspect of employee engagement.
11	Richman	2006	Engagement as an impetus for an employee to employ her/his discretionary energy, efforts, and experience to generate creative resolutions which, in turn, directly benefit the employers without any certain affirmation of personal gain.
12	Gibbons	2006	Expressed that heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for his or her organization, that influences him or her to exert greater discretionary effort to his or her work.
13	The Conference Board	2006	Published "Employee Engagement, A Review of Current Research and Its Implications". Board analyzed and reported, twelve major studies on employee engagement published over the prior four years of time by top research firms such as Gallup, Blessing White, Towers Perrin, the Corporate Leadership Council and others.
14	Macey and Schneider	2008	They conceptualized that employee engagement ripens from (a) trait engagement, (b) state engagement, and (c) behavioral engagement.
15	Bakker & Demerouti	2008	Proposed Job Demand Resources (JD-R) model of work engagement.
16	Simpson	2010	Researched and four lines to characterize engagement, namely: personal engagement, burnout/engagement, work engagement and employee engagement.

Employee engagement may seem a relatively recent concept but actually, it goes back over 28 years when the term first appeared in an academic journal in 1990. Prior to that, during the 70's and 80's, HR's focus was on **employee satisfaction**. But this had little or no connection with performance and was more about the employee than the organization or the employee's relationship with it. The focus then moved from satisfaction to **commitment** (and somewhere along the way 'personnel' became 'human resources'.)

But then things started to change. Increased global competition and the shift from a manufacturing economy to a service one meant employers needed to be more flexible, leaner and competitive. Traditional industries closed or were severely cut back and employees learned the hard way that there were no jobs for life, that to progress in their careers they too needed to be more flexible and move to where the opportunities were. So it benefited the employee but employers soon realized that actually, they were losing people they didn't want to lose. It was costing them money and affecting their ability to compete effectively.

It is at this point in the story that the concept of **employee engagement** matured. After engaging the employees, **sustaining the engaged employee** became important for any organization to flourish.

Following diagram shows the link between the different constructs of the evolution of employee engagement:

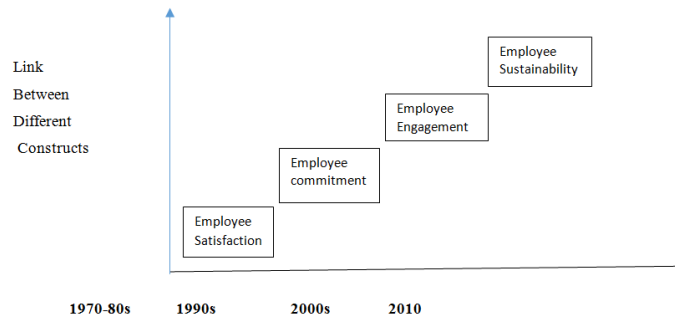


Figure 1: Evolution of Employee Engagement

5.2 Definitions of Employee Engagement

Employee Engagement has been conceptualized in many different ways. There is no single agreed definition and research has shown that however, engagement is defined it is a multi-faceted construct (Kahn, 1990). The existence of various conceptualizations makes the state of knowledge around employee engagement difficult to determine, as each piece of research is undertaken under a different protocol, using different measures of engagement under different circumstances. Following table illustrates various definitions provided by researchers who have studied the term, engagement.

Table 2: Definitions of Employee Engagement by Different Researchers

S. No	Author	Year	Definition
1	Kahn	1990	“Harnessing of organizations members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances”
2	Maslach et al.	2001	A persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfilment.
3	Rothbard	2001	Attention: “the cognitive availability and the amount of time one spends thinking about a role” And Absorption: “the intensity of one’s focus on a role.
4	Dvir et al.	2002	High levels of activity, initiative and responsibility.
5	Harter et al.	2002	The individual’s involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work.
6	Schaufeli et al.	2002	A positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is Characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.
7	Harter et al.	2003	An employee’s involvement with, commitment to, and satisfaction with work.
8	Colbert et al.	2004	High internal motivational state.
9	Wellins and Concelman	2005	The illusive force that motivates employees to Higher(or lower) levels of performance.
10	Erickson	2005	“Engagement is about passion and commitment - the willingness to invest oneself and expend one’s discretionary effort to help the employer success.
11	Mathieu	2006	Experience of authority and responsibility.
12	Bakker and Demerouti	2008	Engaged employees have high levels of energy and are enthusiastic about their work.
13	Bakker and Demerouti	2008	Engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities, and they see themselves as able to deal well with the demands of their jobs.
14	Shimazu and Schaufeli	2009	A unique concept that is best predicted by job resources and personal resources and is predictive of psychological/ physical health, proactive organizational behavior, and job performance.

5.3 Relevance of Employee Engagement

Every organization wants to gain competitive advantage and employee engagement is the best tool for achieving it. In fact, employee engagement is considered to be the most powerful factor to measure a company's vigor and orientation towards superior performance.

Employee engagement has gained tremendous attention from the practitioner's community (Macey et al., 2008) as well because of the linkage with an extensive range of business and individual outcomes (Stroud, 2009). There are also various business outcomes of employee engagement indicated by consulting firms, i.e. sales and revenue growth (Development Dimensions International³²; Gallup, 2007; Hewitt Research Associates, 200; International Survey Research, 2007; Towers Perrin – International Survey Research, 2003; Wellins, Bernthal & Phelps, 2005), individual productivity (Corporate Executive Board, 2004; Kenexa, 2008), financial performance (Gallup, 2007), cost of goods sold, managerial effectiveness, reduced accident rates in organizations (Gallup, 2004), reduced turnover, reduced absenteeism, reductions in quality errors, and reduced malpractice costs (Tritch, 2003). Researchers also linked employee engagement with retention, customer satisfaction, and loyalty (Bates, 2004).

A study by Juan (2010) indicates that the employee engagement has not been effectively managed in many organizations and firms lose between 5%-15% of sales revenue as a result of lack of attention to employee engagement. This suggests that formal employee engagement management systems are important tools contributing to the performance and growth of organizations.

Empirical studies showed that engaged employees score on customer satisfaction-rating scales from 12% (Wagner & Harter, 2006) to 34% (Vance, 2006) higher and brought average \$80,000 to \$120,000 higher sales in each month (Wagner et al., 2006).

Consulting and survey firms like CEB, DDI, Gallup, Society for Human Resources Management and TP-ISR have generated many employee opinion surveys to exemplify their own framework and strategy and have also established their own approaches and perspectives to employee engagement (Shuck & Wollard, 2010⁵²). Massive marketing by these consulting firms for positive bottom-line consequences, created a craze within many organizations, professional societies, and corporate circles in recent years to perform surveys and applying employee engagement practices to rectify the flaws as a panacea for the organizational triumph (Shuck et al., 2010).

Employee engagement research is still in its embryonic stage; in the whole concept it is only the working definitions that have been offered and simultaneously verified for their validity; the antecedents and consequences identified so far, are also very limited. However, new strategies and new philosophies have emerged in the last 28 years to help organizations in this hyper-aggressive business environment of the 21st century to yield more with fewer resources (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008).

Moreover, prudent human resources professionals have started realizing that to gain competitive advantage, organizations have to retain their intellectual workforce and the employee qualities like contribution, commitment, and competence lead to the profitability, sustainability, and vitality of the organizations (Crabtree, 2005).

As a consequence of this, the employee engagement concept has obtained substantial appreciation from many consultants and professionals of human resource and management field and employee engagement is known as one of the very critical and protuberant drivers for business success (Bakker et al., 2008)

Therefore, to recognize well the employee engagement concept's theoretical underpinnings and practical applications, along with the precise and generous understanding of the concept itself and its relational mechanism, the area demands more seminal studies (Saks, 2006)

According to Deloitte Consulting (2014), a study that was conducted in Africa on employee engagement and retention 85% of the respondents indicated that this was a matter that needs to be dealt with urgency while 29% were simply not ready to face the issue. 63% of the respondents from South Africa rated employee engagement as the second most important challenge for South Africa. To attract the best employees, companies must research the market in their area as well as their industry to ensure that their total rewards package (salaries and benefits) is in line with their talent strategy.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This literature review has revealed that employee engagement has been conceptualized in many different ways. There is no single agreed definition and research has shown that however, engagement is defined it is a multi-faceted construct (Kahn, 1990). The existence of various conceptualizations makes the state of knowledge around employee engagement difficult to determine, as each piece of research is undertaken under a different protocol, using different measures of engagement under different circumstances. Despite this potential problem, a similar pattern was found by all regardless of the country or context where the research was undertaken; the highest numbers of employees were found in the 'not engaged' category. This finding is disappointing, although perhaps not very surprising, and clearly many people do not enjoy going to work and gain little meaning from what they do for a living.

Evidence also suggests that employee engagement is related to emotional experiences and wellbeing (May et al 2004). Researchers have found that emotional factors are linked to an individual's personal satisfaction and the sense of inspiration and affirmation they get from their work and from being part of their organization (Towers Perrin 2003). However, a considerable number of employees agree that their company is not a good place to work, suggesting they are emotionally unhappy, whilst others argue emotions should not be allowed to flow free and that employees are more productive when their emotions are managed (Holbeche and Springett 2003).

Engaged employees are also more likely to display discretionary behavior. Engagement has been found to be closely linked to feelings and perceptions around being valued and involved, which in turn generates the kinds of discretionary effort that lead to enhanced performance (Konrad 2006). Such evidence implies that management needs to share control and allow employees to influence important decisions. If they do not, they risk having a workforce, which is not, and cannot be, engaged.

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